



PANHANDLE

BENEWAH, BONNER, BOUNDARY, KOOTENAI, & SHOSHONE COUNTIES

EMPLOYMENT TRENDS

Exceptional weather conditions and a high level of construction activity pushed the Panhandle's seasonally adjusted unemployment to 6.2 percent in March. Relatively warm, dry weather at lower elevations allowed construction to occur at a rapid pace, gave tourist attractions an early start to the summer season, and encouraged summer residents to arrive early. *Construction* employment was 8.8 percent higher in March 2004 than in March 2003. Relatively warm weather at lower elevations, along with an impressive snowpack on three area ski hills, helped push *Leisure & Hospitality* employment 5.0 percent higher this March than in March 2003. Spring break-up never really arrived this year, so most loggers were able to keep working in March. Spring break-up normally is a four- to eight-week period when muddy roads close logging roads or limit loads on them, causing high unemployment in logging communities. *Natural Resources & Mining* (490 Mining jobs plus 790 Logging jobs in March) was 12.3 percent higher this March than the previous March. In addition, hiring at the Center Partners and Verizon call centers and for the new Costco store in Coeur d'Alene brought 330 new jobs at a time of year when jobs usually are scarce.

The Panhandle's three ski areas ended a great ski season on April 11. Communities offering snowmobiling opportunities also benefited from this winter's bumper crop of snow. In addition, convention and business travel has nearly snapped back to its pre-9/11 level. Hotel-motel receipts, as reported in the Idaho Tax Commission's Travel and Convention Tax reports, were 13.1 percent higher at \$11.8 million from November 2003 to February 2004 than the \$10.4 million in November 2002 to February 2003. Bonner County's hotel-motel receipts rose 18.3 percent to \$3.1 million; Kootenai County's receipts rose 11.7 percent to \$7.3 million; and Shoshone County's receipts rose 26.3 percent to \$567,854.

Panhandle Table 1: Labor Force & Employment

	March 2004*	Feb 2004	March 2003	% Change From	
				Last Month	Last Year
INDIVIDUALS BY PLACE OF RESIDENCE					
Seasonally Adjusted					
Civilian Labor Force	93,760	93,040	91,480	0.8	2.5
Unemployed	5,840	6,060	6,910	-3.6	-15.5
% of Labor Force Unemployed	6.2	6.5	7.6		
Total Employment	87,920	86,980	84,570	1.1	4.0
Unadjusted					
Civilian Labor Force	92,750	91,660	90,750	1.2	2.2
Unemployed	8,080	8,270	9,350	-2.3	-13.6
% of Labor Force Unemployed	8.7	9.0	10.3		
Total Employment	84,670	83,390	81,400	1.5	4.0
JOB BY PLACE OF WORK					
Nonfarm Payroll Jobs** - NAICS	68,150	67,280	66,350	1.3	2.7
Goods-Producing Industries	12,580	12,530	12,150	0.4	3.5
Natural Resources & Mining	1,280	1,350	1,140	-5.2	12.3
Construction	4,220	4,090	3,880	3.2	8.8
Manufacturing	7,080	7,090	7,130	-0.1	-0.7
Wood Product Manufacturing	2,680	2,660	2,870	0.8	-6.6
Other Manufacturing	4,400	4,430	4,260	-0.7	3.3
Service-Providing Industries	55,570	54,750	54,200	1.5	2.5
Trade, Transportation, & Utilities	13,240	13,180	13,010	0.5	1.8
Wholesale Trade	1,320	1,310	1,340	0.8	-1.5
Retail Trade	10,130	10,040	9,970	0.9	1.6
Utilities	390	390	380	0.0	2.6
Transportation & Warehousing	1,400	1,440	1,320	-2.8	6.1
Information	1,290	1,180	1,100	9.3	17.3
Financial Activities	2,910	2,880	2,830	1.0	2.8
Professional & Business Services	6,070	5,820	6,230	4.3	-2.6
Educational & Health Services	6,920	6,850	6,650	1.0	4.1
Leisure & Hospitality	7,970	7,790	7,590	2.3	5.0
Other Services	2,230	2,190	2,200	1.8	1.4
Government Education	5,340	5,350	5,230	-0.2	2.1
Government Administration	8,400	8,310	8,200	1.1	2.4
Government Tribes	1,200	1,200	1,160	0.0	3.4

* Preliminary estimate

**Full- or part-time jobs of people who worked for or received wages in the pay period including the 12th of the month

AREA DEVELOPMENTS

Bonner County

- Blanchard, an unincorporated town along State Highway 41 north-west of Spirit Lake, received an Idaho Community Development Block Grant of \$150,000 to complete a new 3,820-square-foot community center that also will be used as a senior center.
- The community around Blanchard definitely will be growing. StoneRidge Golf & Recreational Community, a 650-acre development a mile west of Blanchard, recently broke ground on the \$2.6 million, 28-unit VineYards condominiums along its 14th and 15th holes. Later this spring, StoneRidge will begin construction on a 100-site motor coach village. This fall, it will start a 30-unit townhome development near the 18th hole.

- The Sandpoint Chamber of Commerce still is answering phone calls from people who read the January *Sunset* magazine article touting Sandpoint as “the number 1 small town to live in.” Real estate agents also have seen a rise in inquiries. McCall Aviation’s plan to begin offering regular passenger service between Sandpoint and Seattle in June has also piqued interest in the area.
- After two years without a bowling alley, Sandpoint residents soon will be scoring strikes and spares at R&S Alley at 120 South Division. Owners Brandon and Laurie Birch soon will reopen the bowling lanes.
- Café Trinity, the new eatery at 116 North First Avenue in Sandpoint, is named for a Southern cooking term referring to onions, celery, and green pepper—the essential base for gumbos and other Creole foods. In addition to Louisiana favorites, the restaurant serves southwestern food and California cuisine; on weekends it offers live music.
- Tomm Cann opened Affordable Transmission on 25 Gun Club Road in Sagle, an unincorporated town 10 miles south of Sandpoint.
- Food Barn Discount, a 1,500-square-foot discount grocery, recently opened at the intersection of Church and High in Priest River. Owned by Robert Kovaas and Debra Baker, the discount store offers a full range of groceries at a lower cost.

Boundary County

- Big Boyz Toyz is the new automotive dealership north of Bonners Ferry. Owned by Chris and Shelley Harper, the dealership sells new and used cars, trucks, boats, ATVs, motorcycles, jet skis, and heavy equipment.

Kootenai County

- Harrison, a charming town of 270 residents on the shore of Lake Coeur d’Alene and on the Trail of the Coeur d’Alenes, added 8,000-square feet of moorage to its public docks over the last three years. Harrison also upgraded its boat launch and improved its public swimming area. The projects totaled approximately \$800,000. Harrison’s harbor is a popular area. Avista Corp. reports that 70,610 vehicles stopped at the harbor parking between Memorial Day and Labor Day in 2003. With the 79-mile Trail of the Coeur d’Alenes along the old rail line between Mullan and Plummer gaining in popularity, Harrison also is seeing more visitors arrive on foot or bicycle. The renovation of the former Gateway Marina restaurant and convenience store, now the Foxfire Marina, also should bring more visitor dollars into local hands. Harrison, one of Idaho’s newest Gem Communities, is working hard to make plan for attracting more tourists and improving the town’s economic prospects.
- North Idaho College (NIC) recently broke ground on its long-awaited \$11.9 million Health and Science Building. Slated for completion by August 2005, the 58,000-square-foot building will house ten regular classrooms, two video broadcast classrooms, two auditoriums, and eight labs. NIC’s enrollment rose to 4,450 in the fall of 2003—up 34.8 percent from its enrollment of 3,300 in the fall of 1993.
- Nighthawk Radiology Services, based in Coeur d’Alene, received \$25 million in venture capital to help it expand. Nighthawk provides off-hour telera-diology services to more than 300 hospitals, clinics, and radiology groups across the United States. After 5:00 p.m. local time, Nighthawk sends X-rays and CAT scans to doctors in Sydney, Australia, who provide interpretations within minutes. Given the U.S. shortage of radiologists, it’s often difficult to find radiologists willing to be disturbed in the middle of the night to interpret X-rays and CAT scans. Because the time difference between the two countries is several hours, after hours in the U.S. translates to daytime hours in Australia. The 30 doctors in Australia are U.S. citizens with American medical training. Nighthawk also employs 30 support staff in Sydney. Nighthawk is considering a similar operation in Switzerland. At its headquarters in Coeur d’Alene, four-year-old Nighthawk currently employs 42 people who develop software, conduct marketing, and provide administrative support.
- Hayden is home to these new businesses: Blue Plate Café, serving traditional breakfast and lunch items at 10015 Government Way; Auto Center Northwest, offering auto maintenance and repair at 164 East Hanley; Noodles Express, a fast-food restaurant serving Asian food in the Prairie Shopping Center; and Rocky Mountain Low-Carb Foods & Creamery, selling food for diabetics and people on diets at Highway 95 and Honeysuckle.
- Post Falls recently welcomed these new businesses—Caife Cistin, a coffee house in the River City Plaza; The Hair Zoo, a hair salon serving children and adults in the River City Plaza; Interior Solutions, a wholesaler of office furniture at 285 Frederick Street; and Active Audio, selling and servicing auto sound systems and other electronic accessories at 237 South Young Avenue.
- New Coeur d’Alene businesses include Fortune Whole Health Clinic offering traditional Chinese medicine at 810 North Henry, Suite 420; Pro Golf of America discount store at 408 West Haycraft; Lake-wood Aesthetic Center, offering collagen and botox injections, and other skin care services at 2020 Lake-wood Drive; The Skewed Grill restaurant in the

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Sunset Mall along Highway 95; Pho Thanh & Café, serving Vietnamese food at 2108 North Fourth Street; Wild Bill's Cookhouse at 320 Sherman Avenue; and Paybay, a business that helps sellers use eBay by researching the value, writing the listing, photographing items, and handling the shipping, at 15 East Honeysuckle.

Shoshone County

- After rising to \$8.79 an ounce in early April, the price of silver fell to \$5.92 at the end of April. That's considerably higher than any prices seen from June 1998 through November 2003, when prices hovered around \$4.50. For more than a century, silver prices have been the major determinant of the economic well-being of most Shoshone County residents. Although silver mining has declined significantly, Shoshone County mines directly employ about 300 people. Higher prices mean higher spending by inves-

tors, suppliers, and miners, whose wages are tied to silver prices. They also make it more likely that mines may reopen.

- Lookout Pass Ski Area, the ski area along Interstate 90 near the Idaho-Montana border, enjoyed its best ski season ever, doubling attendance this season over last season. Great snow conditions and recent improvements and terrain expansions helped Lookout post nearly 50,000 skier visits. This summer, Lookout will build a 4,000-square-foot addition to its lodge and add an acre of parking. In the summer of 2005, it will again expand its ski terrain.

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Caribou County

- Caribou Memorial Hospital held an open house to show the public its \$130,000 upgrade. Upgrades included a new human resources office, an Employee Learning Center, and new carpeting and wall coverings in the main hallways. The hospital used Upper Payment Limit (UPL) funds to pay for the upgrades and plans to use UPL funds this year to replace the hospital's roof.
- Excavation work has begun and construction of a new Caribou County Jail should begin this summer. Construction of the new facility will allow Caribou County to house inmates in their own facility instead of paying other counties to provide that service. The new jail will add jobs, but save money in transportation costs and keep the money for housing inmates in the county.
- The Caribou County Fairgrounds in Grace recently received a \$138,000 facelift. Improvements include new restrooms and shower facilities, 16 full-service RV units, and new sod and trees.

Franklin County

- Demolition has begun to clear the former Preston Lumber site for a new development. Leading Technology Development of Cache, Utah, will begin construction of a Family Dollar Discount Store at the

location. Construction of the new facility should take approximately 90 days.

Oneida County

- Hess Pumice Products held an open house to showcase their new welding and machine shop, which is located in Malady. The shop, which will be used to do maintenance on the company's equipment and vehicles, may also be used to provide the same work for other businesses.
- Malad's Classis Car Show increased by 32 entries this year over last year. The successful annual event, sponsored by the Malad Chamber of Commerce, brings entrants and visitors to the city that provides an economic boost to local businesses.

Power County

- FMC Corporation has begun demolition of the Power County facility. Efforts to find alternative uses for the facility continue and the company intends to support that effort by leaving critical assets intact. Dismantling will continue over the next two years.

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